

STATEMENT OF JAMES BACCHUS

GREENBERG TRAURIG LLP

TO THE
COMMITTEE ON RULES
OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 2, 2006

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee on Rules, my name is Jim Bacchus.

I am an attorney and a principal shareholder in the Greenberg Traurig law firm. I first joined Greenberg Traurig right out of law school, in 1979, when the firm had only about 50 attorneys, all in Miami.

I have recently transferred to the firm's Washington office from the firm's Orlando office, which I founded and managed for the firm for a number of years. I am a member of the executive committee of the firm, and I am the chairman of the global trade practice group of the firm.

Although I have not been an active participant in the firm's governmental practice group, I have recently agreed, at the request of my colleagues, to serve as one of the members of the newly-created executive committee that now oversees the firm's overall governmental practice.

I am a registered lobbyist. As part of a broad international law practice, I work from time to time with the executive branch of the federal government on a number of international trade issues for clients of our firm.

I am also a former Member of Congress, from the State of Florida.

In many years of public service, I have, along the way, served also as an aide to the Governor of Florida, as a special assistant to the United States Trade Representative in the Executive Office of the President, and, after leaving the Congress in 1995, as a Member, for eight years, and as the Chairman, for two terms, of the seven-member Appellate Body that serves as the final tribunal of appeal in international trade disputes among the currently 150 Member countries and other customs territories of the World Trade Organization.

So I bring to the issue of lobbying reform a view borne of a varied experience during several decades of dealing with government and with governance in both public and private life.

You are no doubt aware that one of the lobbyists who formerly worked in the Washington office of Greenberg Traurig is named Jack Abramoff.

I trust you are aware also that, when the firm learned of Mr. Abramoff's now confessed transgressions, Greenberg Traurig demanded and received his resignation, and that Greenberg Traurig has since gone to extraordinary lengths to cooperate fully with subsequent investigations as well as to comply fully with all ethical and other obligations to the firm's clients.

I cannot add anything to what others in the firm have previously testified before the Congress about the actions of Mr. Abramoff. During most of the time while he was with the firm, I was on a leave of absence from full-time practice with

the firm, and was busy fulfilling my responsibilities to the Members of the WTO in Geneva, Switzerland.

I can tell you this. In 27 offices throughout the United States and elsewhere in the world, there are about 1500 attorneys and other professionals of Greenberg Traurig who are *not* named Jack Abramoff, and, in my experience, they all work hard every day to do the right thing in the right way.

Nor can I add much of anything to all that you already know about the lobbying of Members of Congress. The truth is, I have considerably more experience in being lobbied than I do in lobbying.

I chose not to seek reelection to the Congress in 1994. I cast my last vote in November of that year. I have not been back to the floor of the House since. Nor have I — I might add — been back to the House gym. So I won't miss those former "perks" of former Members now that you have ended them.

In fact, I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I have been back to Capitol Hill since I cast that last vote more than eleven years ago — with a finger or two left over.

All this said, I am grateful for this invitation to offer my former colleagues and others in the Congress my best advice on how best to reassure the people that the United States House of Representatives truly is representative of the people.

I emphasize: this is my personal advice. On these issues, I do not speak for my firm or for any other member of my firm. I speak only for myself in saying:

By all means, toughen the toothless regulations on lobbying. Require full, frequent, and public electronic disclosure of the precise details of the earnings of lobbyists from lobbying, of the spending of lobbyists on lobbying, of the specific Congressional and staff targets of lobbying, and of all the so-called "grass roots" lobbying spending intended to influence the outcome of Congressional deliberations.

By all means, too, strengthen the legal ethical obligations of Members. If I were still a Member, I would be supporting efforts to ban privately-funded gifts, meals, and travel altogether. It may be, though, that there is room for a bipartisan compromise that would rely in part on "transparency," and would include much more extensive and public disclosure of gifts and meals, as well as strict prior approval of some limited travel for legitimate public purposes.

By all means as well, post conference reports on the Internet, limit earmarks in appropriations bills, lengthen the "revolving door" period for former Members and for former senior staffers alike to at least two years, and require the forfeit of pensions for conviction of a job-related felony.

All this will help. But, from my perspective, all this will not be nearly enough to provide the reassurance the people need that they really are being represented as they should be. So I urge you to go beyond these few reforms, and do much more.

I urge you to provide the necessary staff and the necessary funding to ensure effective oversight and enforcement of both the current lobbying rules and the new rules that have been suggested by reformers in both parties. Rules without the resources to make them real are but empty promises.

I urge you to establish an independent and impartial means of investigating ethics complaints against Members of Congress and their staffs — including the right of private citizens to file such complaints.

I urge Members in both parties to ensure that we have the kind of representation our Constitution requires by supporting reform of Congressional redistricting. I support the initiative underway in Florida now. I supported the proposal made in California by Governor Schwarzenegger last year. The fundamental principle of equal representation must not be sacrificed to partisanship.

I urge you, too, to free yourselves from the endless treadmill of political fundraising by enacting real campaign finance reform. As someone who spent some time on that treadmill with you, my personal preference would be to bar all private political financial contributions, direct and indirect, to Congressional campaigns, and to provide full public campaign financing.

Lastly, I urge my friends and my former colleagues in both parties, and in both the House and the Senate, to rise above understandable partisan concerns, and to find some way of accomplishing these much-needed reforms on a *bipartisan* basis. Perhaps more than anything else you might do, that would reassure the people that you are working *for them*.

If I can help you in any small way in your efforts to achieve these goals, I am more than happy to try to do so.

Thank you very much.